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NHTSA Repeats Rollover Warning to Users of 15-Passenger Vans

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) today re-issued a warning to users of 15-passenger vans because of an increased rollover risk under certain conditions. Similar warnings were issued in 2001 and 2002.

The safety agency also unveiled an updated consumer hangtag for users of 15-passenger vans and released three related research reports. One of the reports is a detailed analysis of 15-passenger van crashes between 1990 and 2002.

The newly released NHTSA research reinforces the fact that 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk that increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases to full capacity. In fact, the likelihood of a rollover when a van is fully loaded is about five times greater than when the vehicle contains only a driver. While an increased likelihood of rollover is present for other types of fully loaded passenger vehicles, it is most pronounced for 15-passenger vans.

The new NHTSA analysis also showed that the risk of rollover increased significantly at speeds over 50 miles per hour and on curved roads.

NHTSA is re-issuing this advisory to specifically alert those who plan to use the vans this summer for group road trips.

"It is vitally important that users of 15-passenger vans be aware of these risks," said NHTSA Administrator Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D. "It is critical that users follow safety precautions to significantly reduce those risks."

Among the safety recommendations are the following:

- It is important that 15-passenger vans be operated by trained, experienced drivers.
- Insist that all occupants wear safety belts at all times. In fact, 76 percent of those who died in 15-passenger van rollovers nationwide in single vehicle

crashes from 1990 to 2002 were not buckled up. An unrestrained 15-passenger van occupant involved in a single vehicle crash is about three times as likely to be killed as a restrained occupant.

- If possible, have passengers and cargo forward of the rear axle and avoid placing any loads on the roof.
- Check your tires: Excessively worn or improperly inflated tires can lead to a loss-of-control situation and a rollover. At least once a month, check that the vans tires are properly inflated and the tread is not worn down.

According to NHTSA research, between 1990 and 2002, there were 1,576 15-passenger vans involved in fatal crashes. Of these, 349 were single vehicle rollover crashes.

In separate research reports involving 15-passenger vans, NHTSA also examined the effects of tire pressure on rollover resistance and assessed the viability of electronic stability control (ESC) systems. The study, using a 2003 Ford F-350 and a 2004 GMC Savana, found that ESC could have some safety benefits under certain conditions.

While federal law prohibits the sale of 15-passenger vans for the school-related transport of high school age and younger students, no such prohibition exists for vehicles to transport college students or other adult passengers.

All the documentation released today, including the agency's comprehensive plan to improve 15-passenger van safety, can be found at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/studies/15PassVans/15PassCustomerAdvistory.htm>